



“A Misty Memory”
Weapons School Graduation Remarks
Saturday, 13 December 2008
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General Norty Schwartz



As Prepared for Delivery

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Colonel Kindsvater, for that warm introduction and for allowing me to join you this evening. It is a pleasure for Suzie and me to be here amongst so many who personify the integrity, service and excellence for which the U.S. Air Force is so well known. It is truly an honor to join you and share with you some thoughts about your significant accomplishment...an accomplishment I am certain you all appreciate, and tonight rightfully celebrate, perhaps more low-key than Thursday night...as you graduate from one of the most rigorous courses the Air Force has to offer. Thanks for having Suzie and me here to celebrate with you.

We could not be more proud of what you have accomplished...and more importantly how you will soon leverage what you have learned here to the betterment of the Joint team. As I look around the audience tonight, it is clear to me we have with us a distinguished group of past graduates and current instructors. I thank each and every one of you for the standard of excellence you sustain, and in the case of the instructors, enforce, as you serve as the vanguard of Air Force weapons and tactics proficiency. The training you provide at weapons school coupled with the expertise you provide in the field is world-class and keeps a sharp edge so that when called upon our Air Force is ready to perform. Thank you all for being here for this important event.

THE MEANING OF GRADUATION

Tonight I will add my thoughts to what you have already heard from your instructors and mentors about the meaning of this graduation and the significance of wearing the famed Weapons School patch, something I was not privileged to earn. But one of the great aspects of today's program is it integrates not just aviators from a variety of platforms, but an array of Airmen who are experts in a range of air, space and cyberspace warfighting disciplines. The truth is that life as you know it has ended, and in its place you are about to enjoy a life of greater demands and expectations than you probably were aware even existed. It is with those demands and expectations in mind that I share with you some ideas about how you should view your position, how you will contribute to winning today's fight and how you must prepare for the



challenges to come. You must never forget who you are and what you represent--and that this is no longer about you--but about us.

TRUE WARRIOR ETHOS

Perhaps Colonel Kindsvater said it best when he was quoted in the recent Air Force magazine article titled “Weapons School Rising.”¹ He noted that graduates are expected to be humble, approachable and credible--traits which are most helpful to superiors and subordinates. This is, of course, quite true and has become and must remain the hallmark of those who wear the patch today. But the most interesting part of his words to me was the “why” he provided as rationale for this emphasis. In speaking of the weapons school he said, “Over time, if left unattended, it could develop into a roving motorcycle gang because these are all meat-eating warriors.” Your commandant pays you a compliment in saying this, and I agree, but he also offers us a compelling notion to consider. Humility, approachability and credibility serve as the ballast for a “fangs-through-the-floor” warrior mindset. We certainly cannot do with only a single side of that equation. I am confident the curriculum and the instructors have done an excellent job of building both sides during your studies here so that our warrior mindset is useful both in combat and in preparation for combat; especially now that each of you is a critical part of preparing others for the rigors of combat as weapons officers. But tonight I want to focus your attention on the “meat-eating warrior” side of the equation--because I have faith that you all understand the needs that compel us all to demonstrate humility, approachability and credibility--and that the Air Force needs you to exemplify these traits to everyone in whom you invest your knowledge and skills. But I need each and every one of you to stay mindful of what it means to be a warrior in the truest sense of the warrior ethos. I am not speaking of rabid fury or unguided aggressiveness. I suggest to you that the true warrior ethos means much more. In recent times, the Air Force has not suffered from a lack of aggressiveness, but rather some individual and systemic lapses in the essential corresponding element of the warrior ethos we call stewardship; the devotion to duty that earns and keeps the trust placed in us, and the willingness to accept responsibility for mission outcomes both large and small, effective and not. I challenge each and every one of you to return to the field as the exemplary tacticians you have proven yourselves to be. More importantly, we need you to stay true to the warrior ethos in the purest sense as you instill these values in others as you teach others the meaning of tactical excellence, devotion to

¹ Adam J. Hebert, *Air Force Magazine*, “Weapons School Rising,” Sept 2008, p. 46



duty, and a collective responsibility and accountability for our performance with precision and reliability. Because you are all leaders; your leaders know your squadron mates will follow you. You must be examples of the warrior ethos in proper balance. Your mindset must be adaptive--able to cycle between the “meat-eating” mode and the humble instructor and advisor mode. The overarching balance between the two modes must also shift over time as you grow, gaining new and greater responsibilities, always teaching others so that they are ready to replace you. Tonight I call your attention to an example of this warrior ethos, and I ask you to consider how to promote these values back home.

A MISTY MEMORY

It was 41-years ago this month that two men were introduced at a place pleasantly and deceptively called “The Plantation.” In December of 1967 a young Navy pilot named John McCain met Air Force Major Bud Day in a cell on the north side of Hanoi. Both men sustained such injuries that no one expected them to survive, yet with the care and support of a team effort our Prisoners of War not only survived against the odds, they helped carry each other--to *Return with Honor*--and became timeless examples of what it means to be a warrior. One book you will see on the new Chief of Staff reading list is *American Patriot* by Robert Coram. It is the life story of Bud Day, and his service is a prime example of the warrior ethos I ask you to consider. It is hard to imagine a more pure warrior spirit than Bud Day’s. From his service as an enlisted Marine in World War II to his time as the original “Misty 1” to his endurance as a POW, Bud Day’s service challenges us as we consider the meaning of the warrior ethos.

As he took command of the outfit in 1967 as a Major with a mere 4,500 flying hours in fighters, he led a small cadre of pilots to develop new tactics of forward air control to meet the demands of the war--instilling in them the tactical excellence and innovative warrior spirit for which he has since become so well-known. As many of you know, the “Misty FACs” demonstrated incredible ingenuity, innovation and devotion to duty. Flying the F-100F, a two-seat version of the Super Sabre, they performed the “Fast FAC” forward air control mission over North Vietnam. This aircraft was not designed for that mission and the job demanded continuous innovation and integration. So Bud Day and the “Mistys” employed a non-traditional approach, flying at low-level between 400-500 knots dodging and “jinking”--fighting then advanced anti-aircraft systems, marking targets to strike. It is an understatement to say the job



was dangerous, for twenty-eight percent of the Mistys would be shot down.² Including their first commander, Bud Day, who led from the front as he often flew six or seven days a week.³ In devotion to duty he invested his tactical expertise in his Airmen.

The lessons learned from their sacrifice are a legacy to us today. Before the war no one anticipated using old F-100s for that mission. Like today's fight has done, chances are the next fight will also unfold in unforeseen ways. You now have the tools of innovation, integration and coordination to face future challenges like those who have gone before you. For Day's Misty FACs went on to shape the future: two Air Force Chiefs of Staff, seven general officers, two astronauts, several industry CEOs, and the first man to fly around the world unrefueled in a light aircraft...all emerged from their ranks. It is important to remember these warriors and the spirit they exhibited, for many of you will be called upon in similar fashion. Much like Airmen today who leverage non-traditional air, space and cyberspace means to help win today's fight. It may be a mission at great personal risk to you and your people, or it may be a mission that requires an innovative application of the means at your disposal. But those you lead by example will surprise you with their ingenuity on the job--and where they end up as the future unfolds. We must never forget the warrior ethos displayed by the Misty FACs that was second to none. We could hardly reflect on a more worthy legacy tonight, than a "Misty" memory of service, sacrifice and the warrior ethos those courageous Airmen displayed in the skies over North Vietnam.

OUR CHALLENGE

There are two portions of this book that challenge us collectively. One portion serves as a challenge to you, and one serves as a challenge to me. The story includes a critique of the Air Force and our warrior mindset that was common during that war--a critique alleging the Air Force was committed more to machines than to the Joint mission and to our people. Now, I won't validate that critique, but a similar sentiment exists today on the margins of public opinion, and this serves as your challenge as you go on from here. For we, each one of us, will prove our commitment through performance, and you will prove worthy to yourselves and to your people as you serve with a true warrior ethos and as an example to your fellow Airmen. And in the years to come you will have the chance to prove your warrior mettle alongside your

² Misty FAC home web site, <http://www.mistyvietnam.com/>, accessed 8 Dec 2008.

³ Robert Coram, *American Patriot*, p. 130



Joint “Battle Buddies,” much like Robbie Risner and Bud Day proved themselves in Hanoi. It is up to us--all of us--to prove that we are fully committed to winning this Nation’s wars, both large and small, those where we operate in prominence and those where our brothers and sisters in arms attract their well justified acclaim. As we show ourselves faithful with the jobs and precious resources under our control, we recall that their acclaim does not diminish us, nor does it threaten us.

The second challenge emerges from a passage that details a meeting between Bud Day and the Chief of Staff at the time. It suggests that Air Force senior leaders were unaccustomed to direct talk, or did not seek dissenting views, saying, “The chief of staff is a demigod surrounded by sycophants who strew roses in his path. Almost never does the chief hear blunt talk.” Similarly, I won’t validate that critique, but I do accept it as a challenge. I commit to you that this will not be the reality in today’s Air Force. All ideas are on the table, including “third rail” issues, and I want to hear innovative ideas on today’s fight and tomorrow’s challenges. I encourage all of you to inspire your people, capture their best ideas, and use the chain of command to elevate and integrate those ideas. I am listening; your leaders are listening--or they’ll be gone. The Nation expects nothing less from its warriors. This is a hallmark of the warrior ethos we need each and every one of you to take back to your units. We need you to be uncompromising, unwavering, and devoted to the esprit, professionalism and excellence exhibited by heroes of the past and the heroes among us here.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I ask you all to reflect upon the meaning of the patch you earned through all your hard work. All of us are mindful of the patch’s prestige, but you must be ready to accept the responsibility and obligations that come along with it. The patch is a symbol of a principled warrior ethos and those principles are only as good as their proven contribution to mission success and victory in combat. In the end, what is more meaningful to you: wearing a patch or success in combat? Consider that a symbol is only worth the substance it represents. In this case, the substance is made up of all you do in the finest tradition of Airmen, as warriors of the highest caliber. Always remember this: your greatest contribution in combat may be through the Airmen you train...that today just might be the last training day before the fight--and that you must always be ready. You have done so much in your young careers, and have served with distinction in all you accomplished, but as you leave here. More will be expected of you, much



more will be demanded of you. And you must never forget that you are keepers of our warrior ethos in the finest tradition of Airmen. Airmen like Bud Day and the Misty FACs whose memory we wish to honor tonight as we also honor your achievement. I am confident you will continue to make the Air Force and the Joint Team proud--and our “Battle Buddies” in the air and on the ground ever more respectful of your talent, your values, and your capacity to turn a scramble into an exquisite ballet of airmanship. Thank you for allowing me to be here with you on this important day. Thank you for serving, and thank you for all you will do as proud graduates of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School.